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SUBJECT: OPPOSITION LAWMAKERS BOYCOTT KNESSET TO PROTEST
LEGISLATION

¶1. (U) The Kadima-led opposition this week united to oppose the government's attempts to pass several measures aimed at increasing the long-term stability of Israeli governments, but also specifically intended to assist Prime Minister Netanyahu. Opposition leader Livni pushed to have the six opposition parties -- encompassing 46 seats in the 120-seat Knesset -- boycott the Knesset's plenum sessions and committee meetings, including the first reading of the budget bill. Some Israeli commentators have called the opposition's tactics unprecedented, and the moves were especially notable because they united such disparate factions as the extreme right-wing National Union and the anti-Zionist Arab-Israeli parties. None of the bills have been presented to the Knesset for their first readings, though reports say that could change as early as June 22.

¶2. (SBU) The most controversial bill would make it easier for members of larger parties to split off and form a new party. Current law requires that one-third of a party's MKs must split in order to avoid punitive measures that most likely would keep the rebellious MKs from being elected to the next Knesset. The proposal would change the law to instead require one-third or seven seats, whichever is easiest. The bill appears to target Kadima's second-in-command, former Likud member Shaul Mofaz, who challenged Livni for the Kadima chairmanship and has publicly advocated for Kadima to be in the government. Some in Likud hope the change would encourage and allow Mofaz to recruit six more Kadima MKs to split with the party and join the coalition. According to Israeli press reports, both Kadima and Likud officials have said they can reach a compromise on other contentious legislation, but would not be flexible on the so-called "Mofaz" bill.

¶3. (U) Another bill would allow a minister who gave his or her seat to someone else from that party to regain it should the party leave the coalition. The measure would alleviate strains in coalition party the Jewish Home that center on former MK Nissan Slomiansky's request that party Chairman and now Science Minister Daniel Hershkovitz step down so that Slomiansky could re-enter the Knesset. Furthermore, the measure would strengthen the coalition's presence in the plenum, as most ministers now spend considerable time running their ministries rather than engaging in parliamentary debate.

¶4. (U) The opposition also has railed against the government for proposing a change to the law governing votes of no confidence. Presently, if a simple majority of the Knesset votes no confidence in the government, the named MK in the original petition is allowed to try to form a government and if he or she fails there are elections. The new legislation would change the procedure so that if the named MK cannot form a government, the original no confidence vote is null and void and the government continues to function.

¶5. (SBU) While some of the measures -- most notably the Mofaz bill -- face opposition on the substance of the legislation alone, it seems that the intensity of the

opposition's response has more to do with a perception that the government is aggressively moving to change the rules solely to ensure its survival. Each of these bills on its own might pass without a full-blown crisis, but when taken together, and when considering that Netanyahu already has won approval for a two-year budget that allows him to avoid a bruising battle next year, it appears to be too much for the opposition to take. Livni's willingness to flout Knesset tradition by leading a parliamentary boycott also could be geared toward accentuating differences with the government so that she can fend off pressure by some in Kadima to join the majority.

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